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SERMON,

DELIVERED AT THE ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. JONATHAN COLE,

AS PASTOR OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY

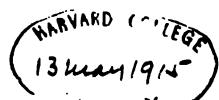
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The Author regrets that unavoidable engagements, both public and private, have prevented an earlier publication of this Sermon.

SERMON.

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ROMANS xii. 11. ————— *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*

Christianity is, certainly, a rational system, but it is not therefore merely speculative and cold. It has its foundation, indeed, in the convictions of the mind, but it is not therefore excluded from the heart. It is not merely a truth, but a sentiment ; a deep, penetrating, thorough, soul-felt sentiment. It is not merely belief, nor yet merely practice ; but while it includes both, it implies something more than either ; something to render faith operative and practice efficient ; namely, a consistent, an energetic, an enlightened, a devoted zeal.

There is reason to believe that the distinguishing views of Unitarian Christians are, in this respect, often misunderstood, or misrepresented. It is stated as a serious objection to them, that they exist chiefly but as a barren notion of the head ; that they are wanting in power over the affections ; that they can breathe no new and fervid life into our spiritual natures ; and that they tend, in consequence, to pro-

duce in those who profess them, lukewarmness and indifference to the whole subject of religion.

Believing this objection to be unfounded and injurious, I have thought that an attempt to remove it might not be inappropriate to an occasion like the present, when we meet together to witness and sanction a union between Pastor and People, whose object is to promote the influence of those leading truths, which are thus called in question.

Believing, moreover, a fair discussion of great principles to be an essential, if not the only means, which God, in his providence, has appointed, of ascertaining the truth, I shrink not from a defence of those which are believed to be unutterably important, even though they should be controversial in their nature. At the same time, I deprecate, I humbly trust, as much as any man, the ordinary spirit of controversy. And if, in the following remarks, I shall contrast our views of Christianity with those of the more popular theology, to the disadvantage of the latter, it is because I shall feel compelled to do so in the conscientious vindication of our own, and by the line of argument I have deemed it proper to pursue. I have no desire to widen the differences in opinion between our fellow Christians and ourselves, still less to exasperate feelings already but too much excited; and my earnest prayer for them and us is that the Spirit of Truth may lead us both into all important truth.

I propose, first, to examine the true nature and value of the objection above mentioned; secondly, to remark on some circumstances which may have

conspired to give it an appearance of reality ; and thirdly, to show, in some particulars, that, in point of fact, our views of Christian Truth are not justly liable to any such objection.

My first remark, in examining the validity of the objection, is, *that the truth or value of any system of faith is not to be decided by the conduct of its professors.* It is obvious that there are many influences continually operating upon men's minds, which interfere with and counteract the legitimate effects of their religious belief. I cannot stop to illustrate so plain a point as this: Examples enough present themselves on every side. Each individual who hears me has reason to mourn that his conduct is so little answerable to his acknowledged rules of duty. Indeed, if a system is to be tried by the conduct of its followers, Christianity itself will be found liable to objection, even as exhibited by the earliest and best of its followers. St. Paul most feelingly declares, "the good that I would, I do not ; but the evil which I would not, that I do." Was St. Paul's faith therefore incorrect, inoperative and dead? Is it not obvious that any and all systems are to be estimated according to their principles, and not according to the conduct of those who embrace them? Could it therefore be substantiated, that as a class of Christians we want zeal and earnestness, it could only prove our own unworthiness, but would leave untouched the substantial value of our faith.

I next observe that if the general conduct of any class of Christians be no decisive evidence of the

value of their religious system, still less is that excitement and fervency of spirit which is commonly denominata Zeal. It is certainly no evidence either of real Christian attainment, or of the truth, or of the value of religious opinions.

Not, first, of Christian *attainment*. It is worthy of remark, the Scriptures more frequently speak of a bad and perverted, than of a praiseworthy zeal. If undirected by higher principles, like any other blind excitement of the feelings, it will become a fever of the heart and brain. Instead of diffusing a cheerful and life-inspiring warmth into the soul, it will become a consuming fire. Instead of exciting all the kind and generous affections into a healthy action, it will call to its aid all the fierce and angry passions ; passions which will rage yet more relentlessly, that they are summoned at the call of conscience. “I bear them record,” says an apostle, “that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge ;” and the world has never been without examples of the same ignorant zeal. An excitement of mind on the subject of religion, which leads men, in a disregard of the proprieties of person, place, time and occasion, to obtrude sacred themes, where they will only be slighted or ridiculed ; an undue attention to the forms and means of religion, with an utter forgetfulness of its substance and end ; a narrow and bigotted attachment to some peculiar doctrines, which closes the mind against further light ;—all these are examples of an uninstructed zeal. And, again, “we may be zealously affected, but not well.” Instances are,

by no means, rare of what has been emphatically called a “cursed ungodliness of zeal;” a zeal which sins against the primal law of Christian charity; a zeal which has trampled upon all the rights of men; the rights of property, person and life; the right of private judgment; a zeal which has lighted the fires of persecution; and led forth armed hosts to legislate for men’s consciences; and to write its creeds on men’s hearts with the sword’s point. And shall we, with these examples before us, take mere zeal as the criterion of the Christian character?

Nor, secondly, is this zeal any decisive, nay, any evidence at all, of the *truth of religious opinions*. If it were, the criterion of truth would be feeling, passion, and not judgment and reason; and the greater the heat and ferment which could be excited in behalf of any opinions, the greater would be the evidence of their truth. But are any willing to abide by the necessary consequences of a rule like this? If so, let them remember, that Heathens, Pagans, Mahometans, Infidels, must have their claims allowed; for all, if not zealots, have zealots among them, and zeal is the decisive characteristic of truth. Nor may we stop here. There is not a sect in christendom that has not been surpassed in zeal by the votaries of dark and dreadful superstitions. And are these to be preferred before those humble followers of Jesus, whose zeal is chastised into a more serene and sober fervency?

Nor, thirdly, is this zeal a criterion of the *value or importance of religious opinions*. It is matter

of obvious remark, that men are often most zealous in regard to things of comparatively little moment. There is no stronger confirmation of this, than is furnished by the history of religious controversy. It is a melancholy truth, to which the annals of the church, in almost every age, bear the fullest attestation, that the most intense and heated zeal has ever been called forth in the support and defence of opinions, in themselves, most unimportant. Minute differences in doctrine, trifling ceremonies, disputes concerning outward apparel, the observance of fasts and feast days, these and numberless other subjects as trifling, have excited a zeal which could only be quenched by the outpouring of innocent blood. Human nature scarcely anywhere appears under so humiliating an aspect, as it wears in the pages of ecclesiastical history. Not only do we find there idle theories and empty forms preferred before the plain and solid truths of the gospel, but an excess of zeal enlisted in their support, which is often extravagant in precise proportion to their insignificance.

Mere zeal, then, is no decisive proof, either of the reality of Christian attainments, or of the soundness or value of the religious opinions, with which it is allied. What, then, it may be asked, is zeal of no importance in our religious concerns? Is it to be swept from the catalogue of Christian motives and influences? Are we not, in the very words of the text, required to be “fervent in spirit?” I answer that it is of great and essential importance; that it is to be cherished and cultivated in our inmost

hearts ; and that without the fervency it inspires we must despair of spiritual strength and growth. But what zeal is thus important ? This is the great question. It is not an excitement of the feelings, which may have more of earth in it than of heaven ; not a zeal which is unenlightened and undirected by God's word ; not a zeal which disregards the claims and feelings of others ; not a zeal which is dogmatical ; not a zeal which is intolerant ; not a zeal which is exclusive ; not a zeal which is pharisaically proud ; not a zeal which "stirreth up the city and maketh tumults ;"—but a true Christian zeal ; a zeal which springs from love to God and love to man ; a zeal which animated our Saviour and Lord to live and die for a sinful world ; a zeal which prompted the holy apostles to pray and weep before God for all men ; to endure contempt and persecution, winds and tempests, seas and prisons, mockings and scourgings, fastings and poverty, labors and wretchedness, and finally to bind their brows with the thorny crown of martyrdom, for their sake ; a zeal of humility ; a zeal of kindness ; in a word, a zeal of a true heaven-born Christian charity, which beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things ; of a charity which never faileth.

We do most highly value a zeal like this. We would enlist all our good affections in the service of our religion. We believe they are necessary to give animation to principle and efficacy to good intentions. We fear being so much afraid of the excesses of fanaticism as not to allow these affections

their rightful influence. We should think it a strong objection to any system of faith, that it had no direct tendency to call them into strong and vigorous exercise. We believe, as fully as any can, that it is utterly vain to bow at the shrines of our religion, if we do not lay our hearts upon her altars.

I have been thus circumstantial, perhaps too circumstantial, on this part of the subject, because it brings into plain view a sad and wide-spread error; and because it indicates and furnishes the proper reply to the objection which I have undertaken to answer. It is often strangely thought, that religious opinions are to be valued by the *degree* of zeal, good or bad, right or wrong, they are capable of producing, or that can, by any means, be identified with them; and that this zeal sends back upon the opinions themselves, a redeeming and sanctifying influence. Nothing is more common than to hear persons claiming a preference for their religious belief, on account of their zeal in giving, their zeal in proselyting, their zeal in making individual sacrifices; and it is a claim which too often passes, without examination, as valid. But it is, nevertheless, true, that it is not the *quantity* of zeal only which is to be taken into the account, but also its *nature* and *effects*.

If the foregoing remarks are just, it is obvious, in the first place, that no legitimate inference against the truth or importance of any system of faith can be derived from the conduct of its professors: secondly, that the mere quantity of zeal which is enlisted by any form of religious faith, or is, by any means

conjoined with it, affords no test, either of Christian attainment, or of the truth or value of the opinions holden. Though the fact, then, be admitted, that we want that zeal on which some of our Christian brethren value themselves, and decry us, the *inference* from it is lame, null and worthless.

I might safely, it is believed, rest my reply to the objection, under discussion, on these grounds. But the subject demands a wider range of remark. Be it then observed, in the second place, that there are many considerations which modify our zeal, and the expressions of it, which do not, in the slightest degree, impair its vitality and power as a principle of conduct. And I now proceed to advert, as was proposed, to some of those circumstances which have conspired to give our views of Christian truth an appearance, I say an appearance, of being speculative, cold, and inoperative upon the affections.

One of the circumstances, which has had, as is believed, this effect, is the *manner in which they have sometimes been inculcated*. I would speak with a becoming diffidence on this subject, and as one who claims no exemption from what he cannot but think is a faulty method of enforcing the claims of any religion. Our views, then, of Christianity, it is apprehended, have been but too often presented in a manner cold, formal, and didactic ; as if they were mere truths in moral philosophy ; as if it were enough to make men Christians, to convince them that it is wise and expedient to become Christians ; as if the reasoning head were alone to be consulted,

and not the believing heart ; as if the affections were not necessary to impart life and vigour to our convictions. In those topics appropriate to the pulpit, and they are far the most important, and of the most frequent occurrence, by which the will is to be influenced as well as the mind instructed ; where information is not so necessary as persuasion ; where impression is more important than conviction ; where the infinite fallacies of self-deceit are to be detected ; the moral infirmities of men probed ; a stubborn worldliness to be broken ; the iron chains of habit to be rent asunder ; the palsied conscience to be quickened ; where, in a word, light is to be thrown in upon the dark concealments of self love, and the heart is to be touched and the deeper feelings interested ; mere abstract speculations, however elegant, refined, or just, are frigid, ill-adapted and unaffected. We want something which bears more the stamp of reality ; something which is less staid and official ; something, too, more distinct, more direct, close and plain-spoken ; something to assure us that *we* are the persons addressed ; *we* the persons interested ; something to convince us that we are not listening to a discourse on abstract questions in morals, but to the Gospel of Jesus Christ ; a gospel enforced by all that a rational being can hope or fear ; a gospel addressed to *us* individually, and which *we* are to receive or reject at our own personal peril.

There is a manner of writing, too, which is, in itself, unexceptionable, and yet utterly bad as a means of persuasion. A composition may

be faultless, saving only that it is without force. It is possible to fill up the time with a sermon, which shall have "proper words in proper places," which shall exhibit, throughout, a high literary finish, and be illustrated, moreover, with fine and tasteful imagery; but which, after all, will be, so far as respects the legitimate objects of preaching, less affecting than the wild strains of fanaticism, as powerless as the prattle of a child. Great results are sacrificed in a studied attention to details; powerful impression in a pursuit of the minor graces of diction; the benefit of the many, in an excessive deference to the refined tastes of a few. Any thing almost that has pith and point is better than this sentence-making, this tame and lifeless rhetoric. The great, the noble, the commanding aim of the speaker, should ever be kept in view; and this is not the amusement, not the gratification of his hearers; still less their admiration of himself; but their conviction, their persuasion; it is to stamp deeply and irresistibly on their minds the impress of his own. "I would rather," says St. Paul, "speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." And how much better, in point of effect, are those words which only play over the surface of the mind, than those in an unknown tongue?

Nor will the preacher, who feels the true dignity and importance of his office, freeze his words as they fall from his lips, by his own apparent indifference to their import, or permit them to vibrate in a

sleepy cadence, or to sink into a drowsy monotony. Nor when he speaks of themes that should strike and rouse the soul, will he speak as if he were performing a set task, but as if he were moved by a strong impulse to speak. He will endeavor to feel as well as to understand the truths he utters, feel them in their full import, feel too the responsibility under which he is acting. Let him but gain this intimate apprehension of important truth, this real, this intense feeling of his subject ; let him forget himself and all things else in the enforcement of his theme, and he need not ask for any other eloquence. He may forego, as secondary things, without a sigh or a care, all mere outside accomplishments, all mere graces of manner. He may be sure that he will not speak to dull and inapprehensive ears. The divine light within will irradiate his countenance ; his whole manner will be imbued with a solemn, tender, affecting earnestness ; his appeals will go like lightning to the souls of men, and penetrate to their very core. This is the foundation of true eloquence ; this is the fountain of sympathy ; this puts words of persuasion on the tongue ; this gives the accents that tone of reality which was never yet mistaken ; this is the Divinity which speaks within ; this is the voice of power, in mortal man, which none can withstand.

There are obvious causes for the adoption of the manner of inculcating our system of faith, which I have ventured to call in question, and which leave entirely untouched the entire seriousness and engagedness of its advocates. This system is prima-

rily addressed to the understanding, and it is probable that a conviction of this fact has prevented more direct addresses to the affections, and rendered the whole tone calm and subdued. In making the argument conclusive, it is often forgotten that the moving principle of the great mass of men is not so much abstract truth as strong sentiment. An abhorrence also of all fanaticism and extravagance, by a natural reaction, may have led to the opposite extreme of naked rationality and apparent indifference. There is often, too, perceived in men of sensitive natures that "faulty bashfulness," spoken of by one of the best of English Essayists, which, in an over-difference to the opinions of the audience, forgets a just respect for the truths they are about to deliver. But whatever the causes of this manner of communicating religious truth may be, the effect is certainly to be deprecated. Until the world becomes more intellectual than it now is, cold dead words, though instinct with oracular wisdom, will fall, like snow-flakes on frozen ground, upon cold, dead hearts. Men wish to see, and have a right to expect, a correspondence between what is said and what is felt. And if they do not, they will be apt to infer that what drops so lifelessly from lifeless tongues, does not, in itself, possess much vitality or power. Now to apply these remarks to the precise object for which they were introduced, it is evident that in whatever degree this apparent want of directness, interest and fervor pervades the inculcation of our views of Christianity, in the same degree will it be charged

upon the views themselves. That there is no foundation, in point of fact, for this, will, I trust, appear in the sequel of the discourse.

Another circumstance which has given an appearance of coldness to our system of faith is, that it is professedly *rational*. By this is meant that we endeavor to interpret the revelation of God, in the Gospel of His Son, by the aid of those powers which belong to us as rational beings. We do not believe that these powers are superseded by a supernatural, uncontrollable influence; an influence imparted to some and withholden from others, upon no known and determinate law; and depending wholly on the arbitrary will of the common Father of mankind. Such a belief must necessarily inspire those who adopt it with an excessive fervency of spirit. But a faith which does not permit us to consider ourselves the especial favorites of Almighty God, and is ascertained by our rational faculties, assisted by His Good Spirit and revealed word, will naturally produce a more modified and guarded zeal; a zeal which is controlled by a reference to every personal and social duty, and devoted to appropriate objects, at fitting times, in a proper degree. Its first object will always be self-improvement, and next, the improvement of others; but always with an entire respect and deference to their character, condition, feelings, and rights. It will never seek to make a convert for the sake of making a convert, but from an earnest desire of making him a better and therefore a happier man. It will regard an attention to any of the means of religion which are incompatible

with a due performance of important personal or relative duty, as a desertion of a greater duty for a less. It is obvious that a zeal like this will be comparatively mild and retiring. It will not manifest itself in sudden and violent efforts; but in a silent and gradual consecration of the soul to God. It will be discovered, rather in conduct, than in profession; more in the solid practical virtues which our Saviour inculcated and exemplified, than in "prophesying, and attempting to do many wonderful works in his name."

And in accordance with this general system, in the next place, its professors feel bound to *avoid all parade and show and ostentation*. And this is another circumstance that has doubtless visited upon their views of religion the imputation of a want of zeal and earnestness. They remember the strong denunciations of the Saviour against all those observances which have a direct reference to this world, while they seem to point to another. They remember his injunctions to conceal our alms, and retire from public observation, when we perform those duties which are intended to disenthral our affections from earth and fix them on things above. They remember that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. They believe that the true spirit of Christianity, if it reign anywhere, reigns in the heart; and makes itself apparent, if at all, in the cheerful, quiet, kind, humble, yet earnest performance of every known duty; and that it has and wants no noisier herald than the unobtrusive evidence of a good and pious life. They do not con-

sider violent religious excitements and commotions, by which the order of society, domestic peace, and the intimate relations of life are broken in upon, as the best proofs of a saving faith. They shrink from bringing their secret and peculiar struggles, trials, hopes, fears, and all the minute detail of their religious experience, into public view. They cannot understand the propriety, to say nothing of the delicacy, of laying their hearts open to the common gaze, and exposing to a vulgar curiosity all their private feelings. They reserve these inward movements of their souls, for the confidential sympathy of pious and bosom friends, and for a hallowed intercourse with the Father of their spirits, in the deepest seclusion. Now this reserve, this avoidance of all public display in regard to their religious concerns, will very naturally appear to those who differ from them in this respect, a proof of coldness and indifference; while, in truth, these circumstances, according to well established principles, are proofs of precisely the reverse. Deep emotion is never forward and garrulous; and the religion of Christ, in this, as in all things else, recognises and proceeds upon the great laws of the human mind.

Another circumstance, which, doubtless, in the opinion of many, has given an appearance of coldness to our views of Christianity, is, that they *do not favour sudden and extravagant emotions of any sort*. We believe that the religious character, like every thing else, which is of any very great value, is formed by degrees. We do not, it is confessed, make much account of great and sudden and over-

whelming fears and agonies, nor of great and sudden and overwhelming joys and transports. We believe that a true religious character has its origin, commonly, in a sober conviction of the understanding, and not in mere feeling; that its perfection, the only perfection of which it is capable on earth, consists in a continual advancement and not in a sinless and impeccable state of holiness. We believe it is a deplorable mistake, in any man, to think he can precisely mark the hour or moment when he was a sinner, and the succeeding hour or moment when he became a saint. And because we cannot point out in the chart of our earthly course the precise spot where we escaped the shoals and quicksands of moral perdition, or relate the blank despair of seeing them in our way, or our extacy of joy at passing them in safety; we are thought to be indifferent to the whole subject; we cannot but think that the inference is as unauthorized as it certainly is unkind.

Another circumstance which comes in aid of the same result, to which I can only allude in passing, is our estimate of the *results*, of the *fruits* of true religion. These we believe to be tranquillity of mind, peace of conscience, humble yet abiding hope and uniform serenity and cheerfulness. We think that when Christianity, in a former age, was hooded in the cowl, shut up in the Cloister, and made the dispenser of uncommanded mortifications and penances; that her very nature was outraged. We think that when, in later times, she is made the patroness of sighs and tears, clad in sackcloth and

in ashes, brought into society to lay a palsying touch upon all innocent enjoyments, to spread a gloom over human faces, to give a sepulchral tone to human voices, and to send a chill through human hearts ;—her very nature is also outraged ; as much as it was in the dark ages of superstition and monachery. And if viewing our religion as the Daughter of Infinite Love, sent into the world on a message of peace and good will to men, as the Guide and only safe Guide to happiness here and hereafter ;—if this be to regard her with coldness and indifference ; we must admit the charge, and hope always to be justly liable to its full import.

I observe, in conclusion of this topic, that our views of the nature of man and of the terms of salvation, compared with more prevalent and popular doctrines, are such as must necessarily modify the exercise and expression of our zeal. We cannot believe, for instance, that men come into this life under the blasting curse of their Creator, that they are his enemies, not, as the apostle expresses it, “ by wicked works,” but from the simple fact of being born into this fallen and lost world. We cannot believe that from this state of utter alienation none can be rescued but by a reception of our peculiar form of belief, and by passing through a certain extraordinary process therein prescribed. Did we believe this ; did we consider ourselves thus the selected champions of God’s cause on earth ; did we regard ourselves as the exclusive possessors of saving truth ; the appointed guardians of that tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the na-

tions; did we believe that our own peculiar and distinctive creed is the only channel through which God's mercy flows to the children of men; did we think that we alone can stand as deliverers between the dead and the living; that we alone, of all mortal men, are commissioned to station ourselves on the brink of the pit of despair, where Almighty wrath is represented as taking its dreadful reprisals for sin, to stay the multitude who are recklessly plunging in; did we believe this, then ought we to be zealous indeed, in the all-important work committed to our care, zealous to the last degree,—so zealous as to think nothing accomplished, while anything remained to be done.

But we do not and cannot make any such exclusive pretensions. We do not and cannot believe that God has confined His mercy to those who receive our form of Christian faith. We do not and cannot believe that the unconscious infant, the benighted heathen, or any others, on whom the gospel light has never shone, are to perish everlasting for lack of that, which, in the providence of our common Father, it was never in their power to obtain. At the same time, be it distinctly noted, we value our views of Christian truth above all things else. We believe them to be the most consoling, the most sustaining, the most delightful, the most elevating, the most sanctifying truths, which the mind of man can receive. We believe them fitted, infinitely better fitted than any other, to meet the moral necessities of men, and to exalt and perfect our natures. We know of nothing to be put in

comparison with them. We wish they could be disseminated throughout the world. We earnestly desire and pray that they may possess and influence every heart. We are, or we ought to be, willing to do, to suffer, and if need be, to die for them. But we do not believe that they are the only passport to God's mercy-seat, to forgiveness and salvation. We believe, on the contrary, that He is the common Father of all ; that He is leading us to Himself by ten thousand ways ; that all will be judged not according to the dogmas of our or any other creed, but according to the light which is imparted to them, and to their sincere endeavors to learn and to do His will ; that, in a word, to adopt the explicit language of the apostle, "all in every nation that fear God and work righteousness shall be accepted of Him." Holding these sentiments, it is obvious that we cannot be actuated by the same kind and degree of zeal which influences those, to whose belief, faithfulness to the subject has obliged me, though with no unfriendly feelings towards them, to advert.

I have thus mentioned in detail some of those circumstances which may have combined to give an appearance of coldness to our views of Christian faith ; while, in truth and in reality, they are justly liable to no such charge. This, I trust, will appear yet more plainly, when, in the last place, I refer to some traits in our peculiar views of Christian truth, which are totally inconsistent with the imputation of a want of warmth and energy to excite and move the heart. On this part of the subject, fertile as it is,

the lapse of time warns me not to detain you long. I can do little more than to gather into a summary a few leading points, each of which would require a treatise for its full developement.

And first, as being the most important in disproving the charge that our system is cold and heartless, I refer you to the views we take of the *character of God*. We regard Him not only as the Creator and Ruler of all things, but as the Universal Father and Friend of man; as one, who though clothed in majesty and might beyond all thought and conception, still condescends to regard us as His children, and to give us access to Him by a filial right. We believe that God is love, that all his dispensations have their origin, and will have their end in love, eternal, unchangeable, ineffable love. Words fail us when we speak of this. The parental relation, even as it exists among mortals, implies that which mortal language cannot utter; and well, then, may it falter and fail in expressing the parental love of our Father in Heaven. We may gain, indeed, some intimations of the *nature* of His parental love, from the emotions of our own bosoms, but they fall as far beneath the great reality, as the earth is beneath the heavens, and are as different in degree as finite is from infinite. And can a system of faith, which regards this a leading, a primal doctrine, be considered cold and heartless?

In further disproof of the charge that our system is wanting in warmth and energy, I might insist upon the fact that it is one which we can *understand*. It appeals to the *minds* of men. We think this of

great importance. For though a mystical and incomprehensible faith may fill the mind with a painful misgiving and despondency, on the principle that what is dark and mysterious is among the elementary principles of terror ; yet the only valuable impressions that can be made upon the heart, must proceed from what is addressed to our perceptions as rational beings. Passion flows and ebbs. Emotions are as changeful as the hues of clouds. Feeling varies with all the influences to which we are subjected. The only solid basis of a solid character is thought, reflection, conviction. The very circumstance then that our religious views are capable of being understood, that it considers revelation as *revealing something*, and something which *men can know and can do*, is better adapted to call forth a really valuable zeal, and interest our better affections, and excite us to virtue and holiness, than all mysteries, however vague or dark or terrific.

I might insist too, in substantiating the same fact, that our system of faith is eminently and peculiarly *practical*. It every where enjoins duty as the end of doctrine, morality as the end of religious faith. It inculcates an universal holiness of heart and life, and makes the formation of a character for heaven the great object of existence on earth. It does not reveal to us any scheme by which we can be freed from the effects of our own conduct ; it does not teach that our final acceptance depends upon the merit or demerit of any other person being imputed to us, or that we are to wait in a state of passive expectancy, until something is done in us and for us,

which we, of ourselves, can do nothing to obtain ; but, on the contrary, that we are acting, in every moment of our conscious existence, in reference to an impartial tribunal ; that God's eye is ever upon us, and that all that is worthy of hope or fear depends upon our own *personal endeavors*, assisted by the promised aid of God's Spirit. It assures us, moreover, that earnest, honest, persevering effort cannot fail. To try is to succeed. To toil is to reap. To struggle is to conquer. To contend is to win. To seek is to find. No good effort is lost. It carries with it, nay it is its own reward. It does something to improve the character ; and improvement of character is happiness, happiness here and happiness hereafter. How very serious is this view of human duty ! What can call forth human effort if this do not ; and how full, at the same time, it is of encouragement and hope !

I might pursue the same train of remark in regard to other leading truths in our system of faith. The august mission of Jesus Christ, his spotless character, its sublimity, its tenderness, its official greatness, its human sympathy, and all the gracious influences of his instructions, life, death and resurrection ; the doctrines of the immortality of the human soul ; of a future state of retribution ; of the promised aid of the holy spirit ; are all themes of the most intense and solemn interest. I might show that our system meets all the moral wants of men, that it has light for every darkened mind, and a balm for every wounded heart.

But I must pass by these subjects with only this

brief allusion to them; and shall advert, in conclusion, to one other trait in our religious belief, which, to my mind, is fraught with life-inspiring energy; and is of itself sufficient to redeem any system from the imputation of being cold and ineffectual. I refer to the belief we entertain of the *progressive nature of Christian attainments*. We think that, in this respect, our views are admirably adapted to that crowning distinction of the human soul, *its capacity of indefinite improvement*. This, more than any thing else, distinguishes man from all other beings on earth. The gradual advancement of the human mind from its first gropings after light in infancy, to that surpassing energy, which emulates the knowledge of superior natures, is an obvious illustration of this. The same is true of our moral capacities. "No man knows what he can do, until he earnestly endeavors to do what he can; and whoever thus earnestly strives to excel, will often find reason to be astonished at his own success." His moral like his intellectual powers will gain strength by exertion; one conquest will lead on to another; faculties of which he was before unconscious will be brought to light. The career of duty is not circumscribed by a narrow circle, in which we must ever tread on in one unvaried round, but is rather to be likened to a continually ascending scale, in which every effort gives an impulse to a higher effort; in which new vigour is derived from every new attainment, and every instance of success is the parent of success. This is universally true of all human exertion. All men who have

gotten in advance of their species in the career of earthly excellence, have ever placed before them the immense, the infinite of perfection ; a model which unfolds a new attractiveness the nearer it is approached, an object which advances as they pursue, and leads them further onward the further they go. The higher they ascend, the wider the field of duty opens on their view ; every difficulty surmounted gives new animation and energy for new trials. This we believe to be peculiarly true of Christian effort. Yes ; the course of virtue is ever onward and upward. It may be begun in humiliation, in tears, in confession, in penitence ; it leads on through the active and passive virtues of our condition in life ; it mounts from one attainment to another ; from light to light ; from grace to grace ; from hope to hope ; from strength to strength ; and aspires at last to the holiness and happiness of sainted perfection. And if such be our capacity of religious improvement on earth, with all the downward influences of passion, infirmity and sin ; what may we not anticipate from that future world, where what is “sown in weakness shall be raised in power ; where what has borne the image of the earthly, shall bear the image of the heavenly ;” where with continually enlarging and improving capacities, we shall approach nearer the Infinite Source of all truth and love ; and where nothing shall limit our progress, but the throne of the Eternal One.

HISTORICAL NOTE,

BY THE REV. ZEPHANIAH WILLIS.

The North part of the town of Plymouth, bounded on the East by the sea, on the North by the town of Duxboro', and on the West by the town of Plympton, was, from the first settlement, designated by the name of Jones River; a large pond in the Northwest corner, and a stream issuing from it and running Easterly four miles to the sea, having been named after **WILLIAM JONES**, Captain of the **May Flower**, the well known ship which transported our fathers, the Pilgrims, to the shore of Plymouth, in 1620.

This part of the town was set off and constitutes a distinct Parish, by the name of *Jones River Parish*, in 1717. It was incorporated as a town, by the name of Kingston, in 1726.

The first Pastor, **JOSEPH STACY**, was born in Cambridge, 1694—graduated at Harvard College, 1719—ordained 1720—died August 25th, 1741, **Æ. 47.**

The second Pastor, **THADDEUS MACARTY**, was born in Boston, graduated at Harvard, 1739—ordained November 3d, 1742—dismissed by his request, 1745. He was afterward installed at Worcester, where he died in the Ministry, at an advanced age.

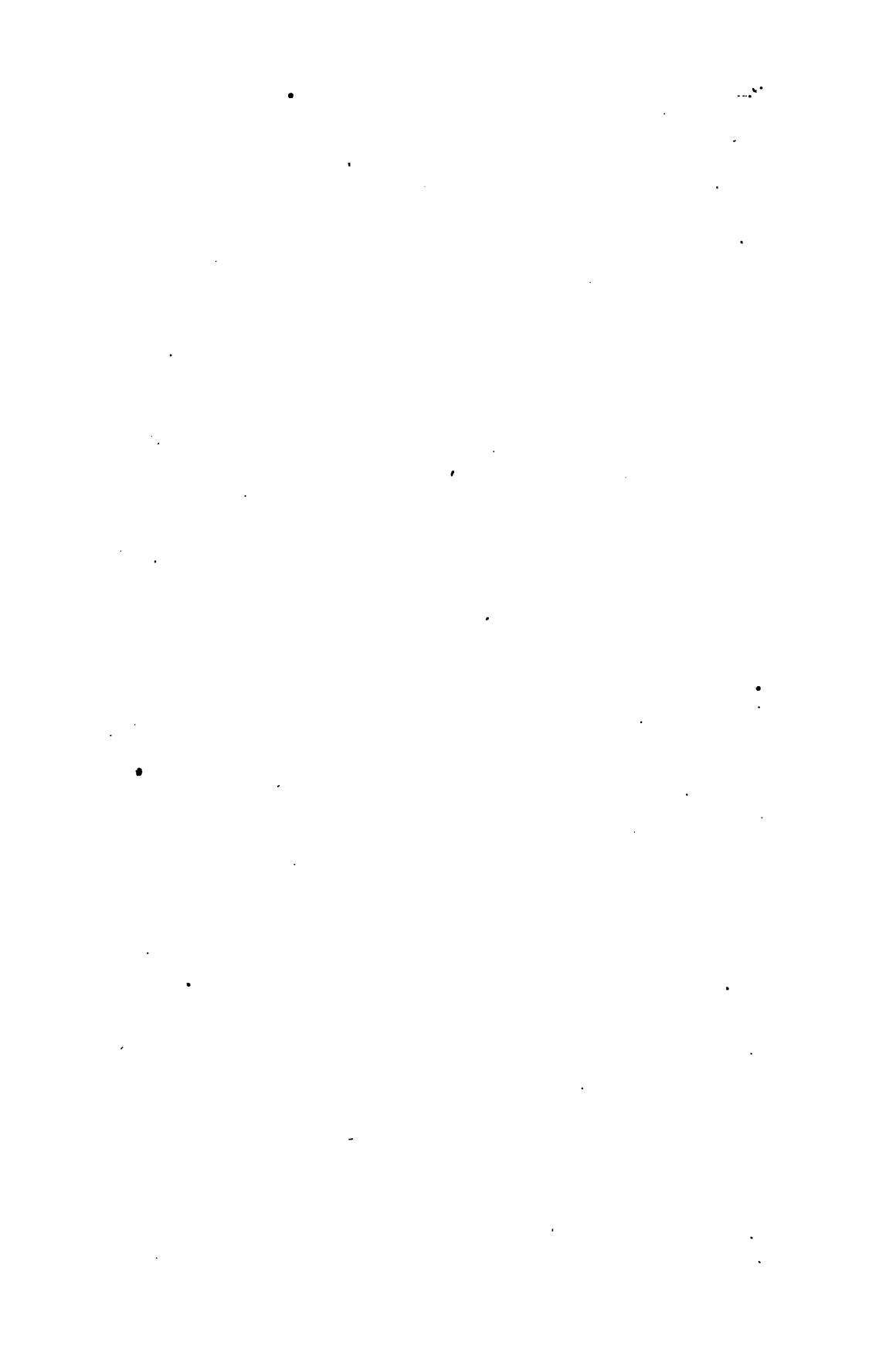
WILLIAM RAND, the third Pastor, was born at Charlestown, Mass. 1700—graduated at Harvard 1721. He was first ordained at Sunderland, on Connecticut River, and was in the Ministry there about twenty

years. After his dismission he was installed at Kingston, 1746—died March 1779, Æ . 79.—Sketches of Characters of the above named, and circumstances attending the Rev. Mr. Macarty's dismission, may be found in the publications of the Historical Society, under the article, *Kingston*.

The fourth Pastor, **ZEPHANIAH WILLIS**, was born at Bridgewater, February 24th, 1757—graduated at Harvard, 1778—ordained October 18th, 1780. The exercise of his Ministry terminated March 18th, 1828.

The fifth Pastor, **JONATHAN COLE**, was born at Marblehead, August 1805—graduated at Harvard 1825—ordained January 21, 1829.





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